

XP326

Am31

n.s. no. 16

Co

ANTI-SLAVERY TRACTS. No. 16. *New Series.*

---

TRIBUTE

OF

WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING

TO THE

AMERICAN ABOLITIONISTS,

FOR THEIR VINDICATION OF

FREEDOM OF SPEECH.

“Living, I shall assert the right of FREE DISCUSSION; dying, I shall assert it; and should I leave no other inheritance to my children, by the blessing of God, I will leave them the inheritance of FREE PRINCIPLES, and the example of a manly and independent defence of them.”— DANIEL WEBSTER.

NEW YORK:

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY.

1861.

---

IN a speech delivered in Niblo's Garden, New York, in 1837, DANIEL WEBSTER said, with an emphasis which elicited from the vast assembly almost deafening cheers—"On the general question of Slavery, a great portion of the community is already strongly excited. The question has not only attracted attention as a question of politics, but it has struck a far deeper chord. IT HAS ARRESTED THE RELIGIOUS FEELING OF THE COUNTRY; IT HAS TAKEN STRONG HOLD OF THE CONSCIENCES OF MEN. *He is a rash man indeed, little conversant with human nature, and especially has he a very erroneous estimate of the character of the people of this country, who supposes that a feeling of this kind is to be trifled with or despised.* IT WILL ASSUREDLY CAUSE ITSELF TO BE RESPECTED. It may be reasoned with; . . . but, to coerce it into silence—to endeavor to restrain its free expression—to seek to compress and confine it, warm as it is, and more heated as such endeavors would inevitably render it—should all this be attempted, I KNOW NOTHING IN THE CONSTITUTION, OR IN THE UNION ITSELF, WHICH WOULD NOT BE ENDANGERED BY THE EXPLOSION WHICH MIGHT FOLLOW."

This estimate of the spirit which animates and controls the Anti-Slavery movement is justified by all the facts connected with the rise and progress of that movement.

---

## CHANNING'S TRIBUTE TO THE ABOLITIONISTS.

---

Lib. 4-22-31 1.00  
It is not my purpose to speak of the Abolitionists as Abolitionists. They now stand before the world in another character, and to this I shall give my present attention. Of their merits and demerits as Abolitionists, I have formerly spoken. In my short work on Slavery, I have expressed my fervent attachment to the great end to which they are pledged, and at the same time my disapprobation, to a certain extent, of their spirit and measures. I have no disposition to travel over this ground again. Had the Abolitionists been left to pursue their object with the freedom which is guaranteed to them by our civil institutions; had they been resisted only by those weapons of reason, rebuke, reprobation, which the laws allow, I should have no inducement to speak of them again, either in praise or censure. But the violence of their adversaries has driven them to a new position. Abolitionism forms an era in our history, if we consider the means by which it has been opposed. Deliberate, systematic efforts have been made, not here or there, but far and wide, to wrest from its adherents that liberty of speech and the press, which our fathers asserted unto blood, and which our National and State Governments are pledged to protect as our most sacred right. Its most conspicuous advocates have been hunted and stoned, its meetings scattered, its presses broken up, and nothing but the patience, constancy and intrepidity of its members has saved it from extinction. The Abolitionists, then, not only appear in the character of the champions of the colored race. *In their persons, the most sacred rights of the white man and the free man have been assailed. They are sufferers for the liberty of thought, speech, and the press; and, in maintaining this liberty amid insult and violence,*

*they deserve a place among its most honorable defenders. In this character I shall now speak of them.*

In regard to the methods adopted by the Abolitionists of promoting emancipation, I might find much to censure; but *when I regard their firm, fearless assertion of the rights of free discussion, of speech and the press, I look on them with unmixed respect. I see nothing to blame, and much to admire.* To them has been committed the most important bulwark of liberty, and *they have acquitted themselves of the trust like men and Christians.* No violence has driven them from their post. Whilst, in obedience to conscience, they have refrained from opposing force to force, they have still persevered amidst menace and insult, in bearing their testimony against wrong, in giving utterance to their deep convictions. *Of such men, I do not hesitate to say, that they have rendered to freedom a more essential service than any body of men among us.* The defenders of freedom are not those who claim and exercise rights which no one assails, or who win shouts of applause by well-turned compliments to liberty in the days of her triumph. *They are those who stand up for rights which mobs, conspiracies, or single tyrants put in jeopardy; who contend for liberty in that particular form which is threatened at the moment by the many or the few. To the Abolitionists this honor belongs.* The first systematic effort to strip the citizen of freedom of speech, they have met with invincible resolution. *From my heart I thank them. I am myself their debtor. I am not sure that I should this moment write in safety, had they shrunk from the conflict, had they shut their lips, imposed silence on their presses, and hid themselves before their ferocious assailants.* I know not where these outrages would have stopped, had they not met resistance from their first destined victims. The newspaper press, with a few exceptions, uttered no genuine indignant rebuke of the wrong-doers, but *rather countenanced, by its gentle censures, the reign of Force.* The mass of the people looked supinely on this new tyranny, under which a portion of their fellow-citizens seemed to be sinking. A tone of denunciation was beginning to proscribe *all* discussion of slavery; and had the spirit of violence, which selected associations as its first object, succeeded in this preparatory enterprise, it might have been easily turned against any and every individual who might presume to agitate the un-

welcome subject. It is hard to say to what outrage the fettered press of the country might not have been reconciled. *I thank the Abolitionists that, in this evil day, they were true to the rights which the multitude were ready to betray.* Their purpose to suffer, to die, rather than surrender their dearest liberties, taught the lawless that they had a foe to contend with, whom it was not safe to press, whilst, like all manly appeals, it called forth reflection and sympathy in the better portion of the community. *In the name of freedom and humanity, I thank them.* Through their courage, the violence, which might have furnished a precedent fatal to freedom, is to become, I trust, a warning to the lawless of the folly as well as crime of attempting to crush opinion by force.

Of all powers, the last to be intrusted to the multitude of men is that of determining what questions shall be discussed. *The greatest truths are often the most unpopular and exasperating;* and were they to be denied discussion, till the many should be ready to accept them, they would never establish themselves in the general mind. *The progress of society depends on nothing more than on the exposure of time-sanctioned abuses,* which cannot be touched without offending multitudes, than on the promulgation of principles, which are in advance of public sentiment and practice, and which are consequently at war with the habits, prejudices, and immediate interests of large classes of the community. Of consequence, the multitude, if once allowed to dictate or proscribe subjects of discussion, would strike society with spiritual blindness and death. The world is to be carried forward by truth, which at first offends, which wins its way by degrees, which the many hate, and would rejoice to crush. *The right of free discussion is, therefore, to be guarded by the friends of mankind with peculiar jealousy.* It is at once the most sacred and most endangered of all our rights. *He who would rob his neighbor of it should have a mark set on him as the worst enemy of freedom.*

I do not know that our history contains a page more disgraceful to us as freemen, than that which records the violences against the Abolitionists. As a people, we are chargeable with other and worse misdeeds, but *none so flagrantly opposed to the spirit of liberty, the very spirit of our institutions,* and of which we make our chief boast. Who, let me

ask, are the men whose offences are so aggravated, that they must be denied the protection of the laws, and be given up to the worst passions of the multitude? Are they profligate in principle and life, teachers of impious or servile doctrines, the enemies of God and their race? I speak not from vague rumor, but from better means of knowledge, when I say, that *a body of men and women, more blameless than the Abolitionists in their various relations, or more disposed to adopt a rigid construction of the Christian precepts, cannot be found among us.* Of their judiciousness and wisdom, I do not speak; but *I believe they yield to no party in moral worth.* Their great crime, and one which, in this land of liberty, is to be punished above all crimes, is this, that they carry the doctrine of human equality to its full extent, that they plead vehemently for the oppressed, that they assail wrong-doing, however sanctioned by opinion or intrenched behind wealth and power, that their zeal for human rights is without measure, that they associate themselves fervently with the Christians and philanthropists of other countries *against the worst relic of barbarous times.* Such is the offence against which mobs are arrayed, and which is counted so flagrant, that a summary justice, too indignant to wait for the tardy process of tribunals, must take the punishment into its own hands.

How strange, in a free country, that the men from whom the liberty of speech is to be torn, are those who use it in pleading for freedom, who devote themselves to the vindication of human rights! What a spectacle is presented to the world by a republic, in which sentence of proscription is passed on citizens who labor, by addressing men's consciences, to enforce the truth, that slavery is the greatest of wrongs! Through the civilized world, the best and greatest men are bearing joint witness against slavery. Christians of all denominations and conditions, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, are bound in a holy league against this most degrading form of oppression. But in free America, the language which despots tolerate must not be heard. One would think that freemen might be pardoned, if the view of fellow-creatures stripped of all human rights should move them to vehemence of speech. But whilst, on all other subjects, the deeply-stirred feelings may overflow in earnest remonstrance, *on slavery, the freeman must speak in whispers, or pay the penalty of persecution for the natural utterance of strong emotion.*

I am aware that the outrages on the Abolitionists are justified or palliated by various considerations; nor is this surprising; for *when did violence ever want excuse?* It is said that Abolitionism tends to stir up insurrection at the South, and to dissolve the Union. Of all pretences for resorting to lawless force, the most dangerous is the *tendency* of measures or opinions. Almost all men see ruinous tendencies in whatever opposes their particular interests or views. All the political parties which have convulsed our country have seen tendencies to national destruction in the principles of their opponents. So infinite are the connections and consequences of human affairs, that nothing can be done in which some dangerous tendency may not be detected. There is a tendency in arguments against any old establishment to unsettle all institutions, because all hang together. There is a tendency in the laying bare of deep-rooted abuses to throw a community into a storm. Liberty tends to licentiousness, government to despotism. Exclude all enterprises which *may* have evil results, and human life will stagnate. Wise men are not easily deterred by difficulties and perils from a course of action which promises great good. Especially when justice and humanity cry aloud for the removal of an enormous social evil, it is unworthy of men and Christians to let the imagination run riot among possible dangers, instead of rousing every energy of mind to study how the evil may be taken away, and the perils which accompany beneficial changes may be escaped.

As to the charge brought against the Abolitionists, of stirring up insurrection at the South, I have never met the shadow of a proof that this nefarious project was meditated by a single member of their body. The accusation is repelled by their characters and principles, as well as by facts; nor can I easily conceive of a sane man giving it belief. As to the "tendency" of their measures to this result, it is such only as we have seen to belong to all human affairs, and such as may easily be guarded against. The truth is, that any exposition of slavery, no matter from whom it may come, may chance to favor revolt. It may chance to fall into the hands of a fanatic, who may think himself summoned by Heaven to remove violently this great wrong; or it may happen to reach the hut of some intelligent, daring slave, who may think himself called to be the avenger of his race. All

things are possible. A casual, innocent remark in conversation may put wild projects into the unbalanced or disordered mind of some hearer. *Must we then live in perpetual silence?* Do such chances make it our duty to shut our lips on the subject of an enormous wrong, and never to send from the press a reprobation of the evil? The truth is, that the great danger to the slaveholder comes from slavery itself, from the silent innovations of time, from political conflicts and convulsions, and not from the writings of strangers. I readily grant that the Abolitionists, in consequence of their number and their systematic and public efforts, are more likely to be heard of by the slave, than a solitary individual who espouses his cause. But when I consider how steadily they have condemned the resort to force on the part of the oppressed; when I consider what power the master possesses of excluding incendiary influences, if such are threatened from abroad; when I remember that, during the late unparalleled excitement at the South, not a symptom of revolt appeared; and when to all this I add the strongly manifested purpose of the Free States to put forth their power, if required, for the suppression of insurrection, it seems to me that none but the most delicate nerves can be disturbed by the movements of the Abolitionists. Can any man, who has a sense of character, affect to believe that the tendency of Abolitionism to stir up a servile war is so palpable and resistless as to require the immediate application of force for its suppression, as to demand the substitution of mobs for the action of law, as to justify the violation of the most sacred right of the citizen?

As to the other charge, that the measures of the Abolitionists endanger our National Union, and must therefore be put down by any and every means, it is weaker than the former. *Against whom has not this charge been hurled? What party among us has not been loaded with this reproach?* Do not we at the North almost unanimously believe that the spirit and measures of nullification have a direct and immediate tendency to dissolve the Union? But are we therefore authorized to silence the nullifier by violence? Should a leader of that party travel among us, is he to be mobbed? Let me further ask, how is it that the Abolitionists endanger the Union? The only reply which I have heard is, that they exasperate the South. *And is it a crime to exasperate men? Who,*



*then, so criminal as the Founder and primitive teachers of our faith?* Have we yet to learn that, in cases of exasperation, the blame is as apt to lie with those who take, as with those who occasion, offence? How strange the doctrine, that men are to be proscribed for uttering language which gives offence, are to be outlawed for putting their neighbors into a passion! Let it also be considered that the Abolitionists are not the only people who exasperate the South. *Can the calmest book be written on slavery, without producing the same effect?* Can the Chief Justice of Massachusetts expound the Constitution and laws of that Commonwealth according to their free spirit, and of course in opposition to slavery, without awakening indignation? Is not the doctrine, that Congress has the right of putting an end to slavery in the District of Columbia *denounced as fiercely as the writings and harangues of Abolitionists?* Where, then, shall mobs stop, if the crime of exasperating the South is so heinous as to deserve their vengeance? If the philanthropist and Christian must be silenced on the subject of slavery, lest they wound the sensitive ears of the South, *ought the judge and legislator to be spared?* Who does not see that these apologies for lawless force, if they have any validity, will bring every good man under its iron sway?

In these remarks, you learn my abhorrence of the violence offered to the Abolitionists, and my admiration of the spirit they have opposed to it. May they vindicate to the end, the rights which in their persons have been outraged!

\* \* \* \* \*

We have those whose opposition to Abolitionism has been wicked, and merits reprobation. Such are to be found in all classes, forming indeed a minority in each, yet numerous enough to deserve attention, and to do much harm. Such are to be found in what is called the highest class of society, that is, *among the rich and fashionable*; and the cause is obvious. *The rich and fashionable belong to the same caste with the slaveholder*; and men are apt to sympathize with their own caste more readily than with those beneath them. The slave is too low, too vulgar, to awaken interest in those who abhor vulgarity more than oppression or crime, and who found all their self-admiration on the rank they occupy in the social scale. Far be it from me to charge on the rich and fashionable, as a class, this moral degradation; but among them are

the worshippers of high degree, who would think their dignity soiled by touching the cause of a menial, degraded race, and who load its advocates with ridicule and scorn.

Then, *in the commercial class*, there are unworthy opposers of Abolitionism. There are those whose interests rouse them to withstand every movement which may offend the South. They have profitable connections with the slaveholder, which must not be endangered by expressions of sympathy with the slave. Gain is their god, and they sacrifice on this altar, without compunction, the rights and happiness of their fellow-creatures. To such, the philanthropy which would break every chain is fanaticism, or a pretence. Nothing in their own souls helps them to comprehend the fervor of men who feel for the wronged, and who hazard property and life in exposing the wrong. This, however, cannot surprise us. Our present civilization is characterized and tainted by a devouring greediness of wealth; and a cause which asserts right against wealth must stir up bitter opposition, especially in cities where this divinity is most adored. Every large city will furnish those who would sooner rivet the chain on the slave than lose a commission, or retrench an expenditure. I would on no account intimate that such men constitute the majority of the commercial class. I rejoice to know that a more honorable spirit prevails in the community which falls more immediately under my notice. Still, the passion for gain is everywhere sapping pure and generous feeling, and everywhere raises up bitter foes against any reform which may threaten to turn aside a stream of wealth. I sometimes feel as if a great social revolution were necessary to break up our present mercenary civilization, in order that Christianity, now repelled by the almost universal worldliness, may come into new contact with the soul, and may reconstruct society, after its own pure and disinterested principles.

In another class, which contains many excellent people, may also be found unworthy opposers of all anti-slavery movements. *I refer to the conservative class*, to those who are tremblingly alive to the spirit of innovation now abroad in the world, who have little or no faith in human progress, who are anxious to secure what is now gained rather than to gain more, to whom that watchword of the times, Reform, sounds like a knell. Among these are to be found individuals, who, from no benevolent interest in society, but simply

because they have drawn high prizes in the lottery of life, are unwilling that the most enormous abuses should be touched, lest the established order of things, so propitious to themselves, should be disturbed. *A palsying, petrifying order, keeping things as they are, seems to them the ideal of a perfect community,* and they have no patience with the rude cry of reformers for the restoration of human beings to their long-lost rights.

I will only add the politicians, as another class which has furnished selfish assailants of Abolitionism. Among our politicians are men, who regard public life as a charmed circle, into which moral principle must not enter, who know no law but expediency, who are prepared to kiss the feet of the South for Southern votes, and *who stand ready to echo all the vituperations of the slaveholder* against the active enemies of slavery in the Free States.

For these various descriptions of selfish opponents of Abolitionism, I make no apology. Let them be visited with just rebuke. \* \* \*

I lay down no rule for others, which I do not feel to be binding on myself. What I should do in the hour of peril may be uncertain; but what I ought to do is plain. What I desire to do is known to the Searcher of all hearts. It is my earnest desire that prosperity may not unnerve me, that no suffering may shake my constancy in a cause which my heart approves. I sometimes indeed fear for myself when I think of untried persecutions. I know not what weaknesses the presence of great danger may call forth. But in my most deliberate moments, I see nothing worth living for but the divine virtue which endures and surrenders all things for truth, duty, and mankind. I look on reproach, poverty, persecution, and death, as light evils compared with unfaithfulness to pure and generous principles, to the spirit of Christ, and to the will of God. With these impressions, I ought not to be deterred by self-distrust, or by my distance from danger, from summoning and cheering others to conflict with evil. Christianity, as I regard it, is designed throughout to fortify us for this warfare. Its great lesson is self-sacrifice. Its distinguishing spirit is Divine Philanthropy suffering on the cross. The Cross, the Cross, this is the badge and standard of our religion. *I honor all who bear it.* I look with scorn on the selfish greatness of this world, and with pity on the most

gifted and prosperous in the struggle for office and power ; but I look with reverence on the obscurest man who suffers for the right, who is true to a good but persecuted cause.

\* \* \* \* \*

In another view, the North sustains relation to slavery. Slavery is our near neighbor ; and *not a few among us grow hardened to it by familiarity. It perverts our moral sense.* We cannot hold intimate connection, national union, with a region where so great an abuse is legalized, and yet escape contamination. To say nothing of friendly, domestic intercourse, *our commercial relations with the Slave States give to not a few a pecuniary interest in the institution.* THE SLAVE IS MORTGAGED TO THE NORTHERN MERCHANT. The slaves' toil is the Northern merchant's wealth, for it produces the great staple on which all the commercial dealings of the country turn. As our merchants and manufacturers cast their eyes southward, what do they see? *Cotton, Cotton, nothing but Cotton.* This fills the whole horizon of the South. What care they for the poor human tools by whom it is reared? Their sympathies are with the man with whom they deal, who trusts them and is trusted by them, and not with the bondmen, by whose sweat they thrive. What change do they desire in a system so gainful? *Under these various influences, the moral feeling of the North in regard to slavery is more or less palsied.* Men call it in vague language an evil, just as they call religion a good ; in both cases giving assent to a lifeless form of words, which they forget whilst they utter them, and which have no power over their lives.

\* \* \* \* \*

But, it is said, the South is passionate, and threatens to secede, *if we agitate this subject of slavery.* Is this no cause of alarm? To this argument, I would offer two answers. First, the South, passionate as it may be, is not insane. Does not the South know, that, in abandoning us on the ground of slavery, it would take the surest step towards converting the Free States to intense and overwhelming abolitionism? Would not slavery become from that moment the grand distinctive idea of the Southern Republic? And would not its Northern rival, by instinct and necessity, found itself on the antagonist principle? In such an event, there would be no need of anti-slavery societies, of abolition agitations, to convert the North. The blow that would sever the Union for

this cause, would produce an instantaneous explosion to shake the whole land. The moral sentiment against slavery, *now kept down by the interests and duties which grow out of union, would burst its fetters*, and be reinforced by the whole strength of the patriotic principle, as well as by all the prejudices and local passions which would follow disunion. Does not the South see that our exemption from the taint of slavery would, in this case, become our main boast? that we should cast the reproach of this institution into her teeth, in very different language from what is now used? that what is now tolerated in sister States, would be intensely hated in separate, rival communities? Let disunion on this ground take place, and then the North may become truly dangerous to the South.

\* \* \* \*

I have now considered the objections to the free discussion of slavery at the North. This discussion is safe; still more, *it is a duty, and must go on*; and, under this and other influences, *the anti-slavery spirit must spread, and must prevail*. Mr. Clay's speech will but aid the movement. The anti-slavery spirit may triumph slowly, but triumph it must and will. It may be thought, that, from my own showing, the success of this cause is not so sure as its friends are accustomed to boast. But, notwithstanding all the obstacles which I have frankly stated, anti-slavery principles have made great progress, have become deep convictions in many souls, within a few years; and the impulse, far from being spent, continually gains strength. There are those who hope that the present movement is a temporary fanaticism. We are even told, that a distinguished Senator from the South, on the close of Mr. Clay's speech, repaid this effort for slavery with unbounded applause, and declared that "Abolitionism was now down." But such men have not studied our times. Strange, that in an age when great principles are stirring the human soul, and when the mass of men, who have hitherto slept, are waking up to thought, it should be imagined that an individual, a name, a breath, can arrest the grand forward movements of society. When will statesmen learn, that there are higher powers than political motives, interests and intrigues? When will they learn the might which dwells in truth? When will they learn, that the great moral and religious Ideas, which have now seized on and are working in men's souls, are the most efficient, durable forces, which

are acting in the world? When will they learn, that the past and present are not the future, but that the changes already wrought in society are only forerunners, signs, and springs of mightier revolutions? \* \* \*

In the great conflict between the Oriental and the Western World, which was decided at Thermopylæ and Marathon; in the last great conflict between Polytheism and Theism, begun by Jesus Christ, and carried on by his followers; in the Reformation of Luther; in the American Revolution; in these grandest epochs of history, what was it which won the victory? What were the mighty, all-prevailing powers? Not political management, not self-interest, not the lower principles of human nature; but the principles of freedom and religion, moral power, moral enthusiasm, the divine aspirations of the human soul. Great thoughts and great emotions have a place in human history, which no historian has hitherto given them, and the future is to be more determined by these than the past. The anti-slavery spirit is not, then, to die under the breath of an orator. *As easily might that breath blow out the sun.* \* \* \*

Allow me to say a few words on a topic which has given me many painful thoughts, the more painful, because so few have seemed to share my feelings. I refer to that gross outrage on rights and liberty, the burning of the Hall of Freedom in Philadelphia. I have felt this the more, *because this Hall was erected for free discussion, was dedicated to Liberty of Speech.* Undoubtedly, it was especially designed to give the Abolitionists a chance of being heard; but it was also intended to give the same privilege to others, who, *in consequence of having adopted unpopular opinions*, might be excluded from the places commonly devoted to public meetings. This building was associated with the dearest right of an intelligent, spiritual being, that of communicating thought, and receiving such communication in return,—more intimately associated with it than any other edifice in the country. And this was stormed by a mob; a peaceful assemblage was driven from its walls; and afterwards it was levelled to the earth by fire.

Various circumstances conspired to take this out of the class of common crimes. It was not the act of the coarse, passionate multitude. It was not done in a transport of fury. The incendiaries proceeded leisurely in their work, and dis-

tinently understood that they were executing the wish and purpose of a great majority of the people. Passionate outbreaks may be forgiven. An act performed by the reckless few does not alarm us, because we know that a moral force subsists in the community to counteract it. But when individuals, to whom we look for a restraining moral power, undertake deliberately the work of the reckless and violent, then the outrage on law and right wears a singularly dark and menacing aspect. Such a community may well feel the foundations of social order tottering beneath them. After the mob of Philadelphia, who wonders at the mob of Harrisburg?

Another aggravation of this act was, that the blameless character of those who had erected and were occupying the Hall of Freedom was distinctly understood. The assemblage thronging this edifice was not made up of profligates, of the false, the lawless, the profane. On that occasion were met together citizens of Philadelphia and visitors from other cities and States, who were second to none in purity of life; and they had convened in obedience to what they believed, however erroneously, the will of God, and to accomplish what seemed to them a great work of justice and humanity. I doubt whether, at that hour, there were collected in any other single spot of the land, so many good and upright men and women, so many sincere friends of the race. In that crowd was John G. Whittier, a man whose genius and virtues would do honor to any city, whose poetry bursts from the soul with the fire and indignant energy of an ancient prophet, and whose noble simplicity of character is said to be the delight of all who know him. In that crowd was Lucretia Mott, that beautiful example of womanhood. Who that has heard the tones of her voice, and looked on the mild radiance of her benign and intelligent countenance, can endure the thought, that such a woman was driven by a mob from a spot to which she had gone, as she religiously believed, on a mission of Christian sympathy? There were many others, worthy associates of those whom I have named, *religious men, prepared to suffer in the cause of humanity, devoted women, whose hearts were burdened with the infinite indignities heaped on their sex by slavery.* SUCH WERE THE PEOPLE WHO WERE DENIED THE PROTECTION OF THE LAWS; *denied the privilege granted to the most profligate political party, and even*

to a meeting of Atheists; treated as outcasts, as the refuse and offscouring of the world. *In them was revived the experience of the first witnesses to the Christian faith.* Happily, Christianity has not wholly failed to improve society. At first, the disciple himself was destroyed; now only his edifice; and this is certainly some progress of the world.

And what was the mighty cause of this outrage? A general reply is, that the Abolitionists were fanatics. Be it so. Is fanaticism a justification of this summary justice? *What more common than this fever in our churches? How does it infect whole sects! What more common in our political meetings?* Must the walls within which fanatics meet be purged by desolating fire? Will not then the whole land be lighted by the flames? Shall I be told, that the fanaticism of Abolitionists is of peculiar atrocity? that they are marked, set apart, by the monstrosity of their doctrines? These doctrines are, *the brotherhood of the human race, and the right of every human being to his own person, and to the protection of equal laws.* Such are the heresies that must be burned out with fire, and buried under the ruins of the temple where they are preached! Undoubtedly, there may be crimes, so unnatural, so terrible to a community, that a people may be forgiven, if, deeming the usual forms of justice too slow, they assume the perilous office of inflicting speedy punishment. But that the processes of law, that the chartered rights of a free people, should be set aside, to punish men *who come together to protest against the greatest wrong in the land,* and whose fanaticism consists in the excess of their *zeal for the oppressed*—this is a doctrine *which puts to shame the dark ages,* and which cannot long keep its ground in our own.

This outrage, if viewed in its political aspects, deserves severe reprobation. Mob-law, in this country, ought always to be frowned down. It is an invasion of the fundamental principle of our institutions, of the sovereignty of the people, and the more dangerous, because it seems to the multitude to be an assertion of the principle which it overthrows. The sovereignty of the people has here but one mode of manifestation, and that is, the laws. It can express itself in no other way; and, consequently, a mob, in forcibly suspending the laws, and in substituting its own will for that which the legitimate organs of the people have proclaimed, *usurps, for*



*a time, the sovereignty of the State, and is virtually rebellion.* In a despotism, the laws are of less moment than in a free country, because in the former there is a force above the laws, an irresistible will, which has at its disposal a subservient soldiery and summary punishments, to maintain something like order in the State. But in a republic there is nothing higher than the laws; and, in shaking the authority of these, the whole social edifice is shaken. Reverence for the laws is the essential spirit, the guardian power, of a free State. Take this away, and no physical force can take its place. The force is in the excited multitude, and, in proportion as it is roused against law, it prepares the way, and constitutes a demand for a more regular, despotic power, which, bad as it is, is better than the tyranny of crowds. There is, indeed, as I have intimated, one case where popular commotion does, comparatively, little harm. I mean, that which is excited by some daring crime, which the laws sternly forbid, and which sends an electric thrill of horror through a virtuous community. In such a case, the public without law do the work of law, and enforce those natural, eternal principles of right, on which all legislation should rest. Even this violence, however, is dangerous. But, be it ever so blameless, who can bring under this head the outrage offered to Abolitionists, men who had broken no law, and *whose distinction was, that they had planted themselves on the ground of natural and everlasting right?*

This outrage against the Abolitionists made little impression on the country at large. It was pronounced wrong, of course; but, then, we were told that the Abolitionists were so imprudent, so fierce, so given to denunciation, so intolerant towards all who differ from them, that they had no great claim to sympathy! Everywhere the excesses of the Abolitionists are used to palliate the persecution which they suffer. But are they the only intolerant people in the country? Is there a single political party, which does not deal as freely in denunciation? Is there a religious sect, which has not its measure of bitterness? I ask, as before, *if fierce denunciation is to be visited with flames, where will the conflagration stop?* \* \* \*

We must endure enthusiasm with its excesses, or sink into a lifeless monotony. These excesses we ought to rebuke and discourage; but we must not hunt them down as the greatest

crimes. We must take heed, lest in our war against rashness, we quench all the generous sentiments of human nature. It is natural to desire that evils should be removed gently, imperceptibly, without agitation; and the more of this quiet process, the better. But it is not ordinarily by such processes that the mysterious providence of God purifies society. Religion and freedom have made their way through struggles and storms. Established evils naturally oppose an iron front to reform; and the spirit of reform, gathering new vehemence from opposition, pours itself forth in passionate efforts. Man is not good enough yet to join invincible courage, zeal, and struggle, with all-suffering meekness. But must conflict with evil cease, because it will be marred with human imperfection? Must the burning spirit lock up its sympathies with suffering humanity, because not sure of being always self-possessed? Do we forgive nothing to the warm-hearted? Should we not labor to temper and guide aright excessive zeal in a virtuous cause, instead of persecuting it as the worst of crimes? \* \* \*

Because I see among the Abolitionists somewhat to fear and blame, must I shut my eyes on more which I ought to commend? Must not men of pure and lofty aims be honored, because, like everything human, they are not free from fault? I respect the Abolitionists for maintaining great principles with courage and fervor, amidst scorn and violence. *Can men have a higher claim to respect?* In their body, amidst prejudiced, narrow-minded, conceited, self-seeking members, such as are found in all associations, *there is a large proportion of uncompromising, single-hearted friends of truth, right, and freedom; and such men are securities against the adoption of criminal ends or criminal means.* In their front rank, perhaps at their head, is Gerrit Smith; a man worthy of all honor for his overflowing munificence, for his calm yet invincible moral courage, for his Christian liberality, embracing men of every sect and name, and for his deep, active, inexhaustible sympathy with the sinful, suffering and oppressed. In their ranks may also be found our common friend, Charles Follen, that genuine man, that heroic spirit, whose love of freedom unites, in rare harmony, the old Roman force with Christian love, in whom we see the generous, rash enthusiasm of his youth, tempered by time and trial into a most sweet and winning virtue. I could name others,

honored and dear. I do not, for the sake of such, shut my eyes on the defects of the association; but that it should be selected for outrage and persecution *is a monstrous wrong, against which solemn testimony ought to be borne.*

There is one consolation attending persecution. It often exalts the spirit of the sufferer, and often covers with honor those whom it had destined to shame. Who made Socrates the most venerable name of antiquity? The men who mixed for him the cup of hemlock, and drove him as a criminal from the world which he had enlightened. Providence teaches us the doctrine of retribution very touchingly in the fact, that future ages guard with peculiar reverence the memories of men, *who, in their own times, were contemned, abhorred, hunted like wild beasts, and destroyed by fire or sword, for their fidelity to truth.* That the Abolitionists have grown strong under outrage, we know; and *in this I should rejoice, were their cause ever so bad; because persecution must be worse, and its defeat must be a good.* I wish that persecution, if not checked by principle, may be stayed, by seeing that it fights against itself, and builds up those whom it toils to destroy. How long the Abolitionists will be remembered, I know not; but *as long as they live in history, they will wear as a crown the sufferings which they have so firmly borne.* Posterity will be just to them; *nor can I doubt what doom posterity will pronounce on the mobs or single men who have labored to silence them by brutal force.* I should be glad to see them exchanging their array of affiliated societies for less conspicuous and artificial means of action. But let them not do this from subserviency to opinion, or in opposition to their sense of right. *Let them yield nothing to fear. Let them never be false to that great cause which they have fought for so manfully, Freedom of Speech. Let them never give countenance to the doctrine, which all tyrants hold, that material power, physical pain, is mightier than the convictions of Reason, than the principle of Duty, than the love of God and mankind. Sooner may they pine and perish in prisons, sooner bleed or be strangled by the executioner, than surrender their deliberate principles to lawless violence.* \* \* \*

The civilized world will heap just reproaches on a *free* nation, in which mobs pour forth their fury on the opposers of *slavery.* These mobs are, indeed, most dishonorable to us

as a people, because they have been too much the expression of public sentiment. Against this sentiment I feel bound to bear earnest and indignant testimony. The language which filled the country at the time of these disturbances was such as should never have passed the lips of freemen. Nothing was more common than to hear it said, "These mobs are bad, but they will put down *Anti-Slavery*." Why was it that these mobs ruled our largest city for several successive nights? Because there was a willingness that the anti-slavery movement should be put down by force. The mobs, considered in themselves, were of secondary importance. In the present low condition of society, every great city has materials for them. But the spirit of the community which gave them scope, and which wished them success, deserves the severest reprobation of the philanthropist and the Christian. The truth is, that, as a people, we are indifferent to the greatest of wrongs and calamities, that is, slavery, and therefore, whilst we can tolerate all other excesses, we cannot away with the excesses of the friends of emancipation. There is no sympathy with those who are wounded and stung with the injuries of the slave, and therefore we are willing that the dearest right of freemen, that of free discussion, should be wrested from them. It is this state of feeling in the community which is far more melancholy than a vulgar mob. It is impossible to read the newspapers of the country, without seeing the profound unconcern which pervades the country on the subject of slavery. In truth, New England has been disgraced by publications going to reconcile us to the evil. It is said, again and again, that we have no right to meddle with slavery at the South. What! is it meddling, to discuss a great question, one which involves the happiness of millions, and to spread abroad neglected truth? \* \* \* \*

The New England Anti-Slavery Society has celebrated its anniversary. Yesterday I was present at one of its meetings, and you may be gratified by some observations on its proceedings. \* \* \* My principal object in attending it was to judge for myself of the spirit of this Society. \* \*

The most gratifying circumstance at the meeting was a short address from a colored man. His complexion led me to think he was of pure African blood, and his diction, his countenance, his gestures, his thoughts, his whole bearing, must have convinced every hearer that the African is a man,

in the highest sense of that word. I felt that he was a partaker with me of that humanity for which I unceasingly thank my Creator. I felt on this occasion, as I perhaps never felt before, what an amount of intellectual and moral energy is crushed, is lost to the human race, by slavery. Among the two or three millions doomed by this system to brutal ignorance, and denied the means of developing their powers, how many men and women are there, who, under the culture and self-respect which belong to American freedom, would become blessings and ornaments to society, by their intelligence and virtue!

I was much struck, at this meeting, with the life which seemed to possess its members. Nothing was said or done mechanically. There was no forced zeal, no effort of the leaders to whip up the lagging spirit of the mass. It is easy, on entering a meeting, to tell at once whether it is a living or a dead one — whether people have come together from habit, from a cold sense of propriety or duty, or from a deep, irresistible impulse. You know by instinct whether you are surrounded by life or death. This body was alive. I am sure that, if the stirrers up of mobs could have looked into the souls of these Abolitionists, *they would have seen the infinite folly of attempting to put them down by such persecutions as they can bring to bear on them.* Nothing but the inquisition, the stake, the scaffold, nothing but extermination, can do the work. All other measures do but minister new life to the spirit which they are employed to subdue. Abolitionism has nothing to fear, but from indifference. The only policy which can avail against it, is to let it alone. The vehemence of the South has given it an importance and energy which the struggles of years could not have won for it.

\* \* \* \* \*

And has it come to this? Has Boston fallen so low? May not its citizens be trusted to come together to express the great principles of liberty, for which their fathers died? Are our fellow-citizens to be *murdered* in the act of defending their property, and of asserting the right of free discussion; and is it unsafe, in this metropolis, once the refuge of liberty, to express abhorrence of the deed? If such be our degradation, we ought to know the awful truth; and those among us who retain a portion of the spirit of our ancestors should set themselves to work to recover their degenerate posterity.

But I do not believe in this degeneracy. The people of Boston may be trusted. There is a moral soundness in this community on the great points involved in the petition which has been rejected. There is among us a deep abhorrence of the spirit of violence which is spreading through our land; and from this city ought to go forth a voice to awaken the whole country to its danger, to the growing peril of the substitution of lawless force for the authority of the laws.

\* \* \* \* \*

"The times are changed, and we change with them." Are there no signs, is there nothing to make us fear, that the freedom of speech and the press, regarded as a *right* and a *principle*, is dying out of the hearts of this people? It is not a sufficient answer to say that the vast majority speak and publish their thoughts without danger. The question is, whether this freedom is distinctly and practically recognized as *every man's right*. Unless it stands on this ground, it is little more than a name; it has no permanent life. To refuse it to a minority, however small, is to loosen every man's hold of it, to violate its sacredness, to break up its foundation. A despotism too strong for fear, may, through its very strength, allow to the mass great liberty of utterance; but in conceding it as a privilege, and not *as a right*, and by withholding it at pleasure from offensive individuals, the despot betrays himself as truly as if he had put a seal on every man's lips. That State must not call itself free, in which any party, however small, cannot safely speak its mind; in which any party is exposed to violence for the exercise of a universal right; in which the laws, made to protect all, cannot be sustained against brute force. The freedom of speech and the press seems now to be sharing the lot of all great principles. History shows us that all great principles, however ardently espoused for a time, have a tendency to fade into traditions, to degenerate into a hollow cant, to become words of little import, and to remain for declamation, when their vital power is gone. At such a period, every good citizen is called to do what in him lies to restore their life and power. To some, it may be a disheartening thought, that the battle of liberty is never to end, that its first principles must be established anew, on the very spots where they seemed immovably fixed. But it is the law of our being, that no true good can be made sure without struggle; and it should cheer us to think, that to struggle for

the right is the noblest use of our powers, and the only means of happiness and perfection. \* \* \*

We are told, by the South, that slavery is no concern of ours, and, consequently, that the less we say of it, the better. What! shall the wrong-doer forbid lookers-on to speak, because the affair is a private one, in which others must not interfere? Whoever injures a man *binds all men to remonstrate, especially when the injured is too weak to speak in his own behalf.* Let none imagine, that, by seizing a fellow-creature and setting him apart as a chattel, they can sever his ties to God or man. Spiritual connections are not so easily broken. You may carry your victim never so far; you may seclude him on a plantation or in a cell; but you cannot transport him beyond the sphere of human brotherhood, or cut him off from his race. *The great bond of humanity is the last to be dissolved.* Other ties, those of family and civil society, are severed by death. This, founded as it is on what is immortal in our nature, has an everlasting sacredness, and is never broken; and *every man has a right, and, still more, is bound to lift up his voice against its violation.*

There are many whose testimony against slavery is very much diluted by the fact of its having been so long sanctioned, not only by usage, but by law, by public force, by the forms of civil authority. They bow before numbers and prescription. But in an age of inquiry and innovation, (when other institutions must make good their title to continuance,) it is a suspicious tenderness which fears to touch a heavy yoke, because it has grown by time into the necks of our fellow-creatures. Do we not know that unjust monopolies, cruel prejudices, barbarous punishments, oppressive institutions, have been upheld by law for ages? Majorities are prone to think that they can create right by vote, and can legalize gainful crimes by calling the forms of justice to their support. But *these conspiracies against humanity, these insults offered to the majesty and immutableness of truth and rectitude, are the last forms of wickedness to be spared.* Selfish men, by combining into a majority, cannot change tyranny into right. The whole earth may cry out, that this or that man was made to be owned and used as a chattel, or a brute, by his brother; but his birthright as a man, as a rational creature of God, cleaves to him untouched by the

clamor. Crimes, exalted into laws, become therefore the more odious; just as the false gods of heathenism, when set up of old on the altar of Jehovah, shocked his true worshippers the more by usurping so conspicuously the honors due to Him alone.

*It is important that we should, each of us, bear our conscientious testimony against slavery, not only to swell that tide of public opinion which is to sweep it away, but that we may save ourselves from sinking into silent, unsuspected acquiescence in the evil.* A constant resistance is needed to this downward tendency, as is proved by the tone of feeling in the Free States. What is more common among ourselves than a courteous, apologetic disapprobation of slavery, which differs little from taking its part? This is one of its worst influences. It taints the whole country. The existence, the perpetual presence of a great, prosperous, unrestrained system of wrong in a community, is one of the sorest trials to the moral sense of the people, and needs to be earnestly withstood. The idea of justice becomes unconsciously obscured in our minds. Our hearts become more or less seared to wrong. The South says, that slavery is nothing to us at the North. But, *through our trade, we* are brought into constant contact with it; we grow familiar with it; still more, we thrive by it; and the next step is easy, *to consent to the sacrifice of human beings by whom we prosper.* The dead know not their want of life; and so a people, whose moral sentiments are palsied by the interweaving of all their interests with a system of oppression, become degraded without suspecting it. In consequence of this connection with slave countries, the idea of Human Rights, that great idea of our age, and on which we profess to build our institutions, *is darkened, weakened, among us, so as to be to many little more than a sound.*